

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 050867

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT:

FOLLOWING REPEAT CINCPAC MSG 050309Z MAR 77 TO SECSTATE
WELLINGTON INFO SUVA FIJI ISLANDS

QTE C O N F I D E N T I A L/PA1/PA

WESTERN SAMOA AND THE QUEEN'S CAR CAPER

1. THE AFFAIR OF THE QUEEN'S AUTOMOBILES HAS HIT THE HONOLULU PRESS
CONTAINING MAJOR INACCURACIES, FOLLOWING UPI ARTICLE DATE LINED APIA
APPEARED ON FRONT PAGE OF MARCH 4 HONOLULU ADVERTISER. BEGIN TEXT.

QUOTE:

"THE WESTERN SAMOA GOVERNMENT YESTERDAY REJECTED AN AMERICAN
OFFER TO BUILD TWO LIGHTHOUSES IN THESE ISLANDS. A SPOKESMAN BLAMED
LAST MONTH'S PAYMENT DISPUTE AND SHIPMENT FROM HONOLULU OF TWO USED
CARS BY THE U.S. AIR FORCE FOR THE REJECTION.

"WE DON'T WANT TO GO THROUGH ANOTHER EXPERIENCE WITH THE U.S.
LIKE WE DID WITH THE CARS," SAID MINISTER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
ASI EIKENI. "THE AMERICAN COAST GUARD HAD OFFERED TO HELP INSTALL
THE TWO LIGHTHOUSES FOR FREE, BUT AFTER OUR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE
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WE ARE AFRAID THE AMERICANS WILL HAND US A BILL FOR THE JOB. WE WILL
DO IT WITHOUT THE COAST GUARD'SHELP, AND INSTALL THE LIGHT HOUSES
OURSELVES."

THE WESTERN SAMOANS SAID THEY LEARNED ABOUT WASHINGTON BUREAUC-
RACY WHEN THEY SOUGHT HELP IN AIRLIFTING TWO USED LIMOUSINES FROM
HONOLULU TO THEIR CAPITAL, 2,400 MILES SOUTHWEST OF HAWAII. THE
CARS WERE TO BE USED FOR THE VISIT OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II FEB 11.

THE MINISTER TOLD NEWSMEN HE HAD BEEN ASSURED BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT ADVISER IN HAWAII THAT THE CARS WOULD BE FLOWN TO AMERICAN SAMOA ON ONE OF THE ROUTINE AIR FORCE LOGISTIC FLIGHTS BETWEEN HONOLULU AND PAGO PAGO, APPARENTLY AT NO COST TO THE WESTERN SAMOA GOVERNMENT. EIKENI SAID HIS REQUEST HAD BEEN MADE THROUGH U. S. AMBASSADOR ARMISTEAD SELDEN, JR., IN NEW ZEALAND.

WITH THIS ASSURANCE, EIKENI SAID HE PURCHASED TWO USED LIMOUSINES IN HONOLULU FOR \$13,000, ASSUMING THE AMERICANS WOULD FLY THEM TO PAGO PAGO, 80 MILES EAST OF APIA WHERE THE WESTERN SAMOA SHIP WOULD TAKE THEM TO APIA.

"IT WAS THEN THAT WE BECAME ENMESHED IN CONFUSED COMMUNICATIONS OFFICIAL BUNGLING, BUREAUCRATIC DOUBLETALK AND UNWARRANTED INNUENDOS AGAINST SAMOAN ACTIVITIES BY THE U.S. PRESS WHICH HAVE IMPUGNED SAMOAN INTEGRITY," HE SAID.

THE FIRST BLOW WAS AN APPARENT CHANGE OF HEART BY THE AIR FORCE WHICH SUDDENLY DISCOVERED IT COULD NOT PERFORM SUCH AID MISSIONS WHERE THERE IS AN ESTABLISHED, COMMERCIAL AIRLINE. PAN AM SAID IT WOULD COST THE WESTERN SAMOANS \$60,000 TO FLY THE TWO CARS FROM HONOLULU TO PAGO PAGO.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT THEN TOLD US IT HAD GOTTEN PENTAGON APPROVAL BUT THE COST WOULD BE \$18,000, PAYABLE IN ADVANCE," EIKENI SAID.

WHILE THE APIA GOVERNMENT WAS MULLING THIS OVER, EIKENI SAID WASHINGTON PHONED HIS GOVERNMENT SAYING THE TWO CARS HAD BEEN SHIPPED BUT THE PRICE HAD NOW GONE UP TO \$21,473, AND THAT THE CARS WOULD BE IMPOUNDED IN PAGO PAGO UNTIL THE FREIGHT CHARGES WERE PAID, IN CASH AND IN U.S. DOLLARS.

EIKENI SAID HIS GOVERNMENT HAD NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO PAY THE MONEY DEMANDED BY THE AMERICANS.

HE CONTRADICTED THE AMERICAN OFFICIALS IN HAWAII WHO SAID THE CONFIDENTIAL

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WESTERN SAMOA GOVERNMENT HAD INDICATED DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS THAT THE SOVIETS OFFERED TO FLY THE CARS TO APIA FOR FREE.

"WE DID NOT PLAY THE U.S.A. AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS, OR VICE VERSA," HE SAID. "WE NEVER TALKED TO THE RUSSIANS OR CHINESE AT ALL AT ONE POINT THE SOVIETS WANTED TO KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON AND WE TOLD THEM IT WAS NONE OF THEIR BUSINESS."

OTHER WESTERN SAMOA OFFICIALS SAID THEY WERE ANGERED WHEN THE AMERICAN SAMOA GOVERNMENT JAILED THE MASTER AND ENGINEER OF THEIR SHIP SENT TO PAGO PAGO TO PICK UP THE CARS.

DURING THE WAIT FOR THE TWO CARS, THE TWO WESTERN SAMOANS WERE ACCUSED OF BEING DRUNK AND RIPPING A TELEPHONE FROM THE WALL WHEN THEY FAILED TO GET THEIR NUMBER.

AMERICAN SAMOA AUTHORITIES SAID THE TWO WERE HELD UNTIL PAYMENT FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF AMERICAN PROPERTY HAD BEEN PAID - IN DOLLARS. ONLY THEN WERE THE MEN RELEASED AND THE SHIP ALLOWED TO TAKE THE TWO CARS ON THE FINAL LEG OF THE JOURNEY. UNQUOTE.

2.(U) WE DO NOT KNOW SOURCE OR MOTIVATION OF ARTICLE, BUT MAY HAVE BEEN BY ROBERT C. MILLER WHO BY-LINED AN ARTICLE ON FRONT PAGE SAME PAPER FEBRUARY 10. THAT ARTICLE SAID "RUSSIANS OFFERED TO FLY THE

TWO CARS TO SAMOA FREE FROM ANY AIRFIELD IN THE WORLD," AND THAT ONLY AS CONSEQUENCE DID US AGREE TO SHIP THEM. THEREFORE, SAMOA SHOULD "CREDIT THE KREMLIN WITH AN ASSIST."

3. (C) REFERENCE TO "STATE DEPARTMENT ADVISER IN HAWAII" IN MARCH 4 ARTICLE TOTALLY WITHOUT BASIS. ONLY MEETING WITH EIKENI ON THIS ISSUE BY ANY STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICER IN HAWAII WAS DEPUTY POLAD'S PRESENCE AT MEETINGS BETWEEN EIKENI AND CINCPAC STAFF. AT BOTH MEETINGS EIKENI WAS TOLD MILITARY AIRLIFT COULD NOT BE PROVIDED GRATIS.

4. (C) COMMENT ON COAST GUARD LIGHTHOUSES MAY REFER TO GWS REQUEST THAT USG HELP IN HELOLIFT OF NAVIGATIONAL TOWERS. (REF WELLINGTON MESSAGE 072131 NOV 76).

5. (C) IF EIKENI QUOTED ACCURATELY, HE MAY BE MAKING A HAM-HANDED EFFORT TO SHIFT THE BLAME FOR HIS HANDLING OF THIS ISSUE. NO ONE IN CINCPAC UNDERTOOK ANY INDEPENDENT COMMITMENT TO ASSIST THE GOWS, EIKENI WAS GIVEN COMPLETE AND ACCURATE INFORMATION, HE WAS AWARE THAT WHATEVER HE WAS TOLD WAS BASED ON WASHINGTON GUIDANCE, AND HE
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FULLY UNDERSTOOD USG POSITION AT EACH POINT.

6. (C) EVEN IF EIKENI MISQUOTED, WE ARE CONCERNED THAT NEWSTORIES LIKE THIS COULD BE DETRIMENTAL TO USG EFFORTS TO DEVELOP A PROGRAM OF MODEST ASSISTANCE TO SOUTH PACIFIC NATIONS.

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